

# NEWSRELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2007

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### **Report: Inmate growth slow, parole numbers rise rapidly**

Montana's trend toward greater use of community corrections programs and less dependence on prison is demonstrated in a new report released by U.S. Justice Department.

In 2006, Montana had the nation's 17<sup>th</sup> lowest growth rate in the number of inmates under state jurisdiction and had the 4<sup>th</sup> highest increase in the number of offenders on parole, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The state also had the 13<sup>th</sup> greatest increase in the number of offenders on probation.

Also, Montana's incarceration rate for state and federal offenders continued to be significantly below the national average. The report said the rate in Montana was 374 per 100,000 residents, compared with 501 for the country. That means Montana's rate was 25.4 percent less than the U.S. average. Only 21 states had a lower rate.

"This report shows the results of the state's policies designed to put more emphasis on alternatives to prison," said Mike Ferriter, Department of Corrections director. "Only 16 states have a lower growth in prison populations and that hasn't happened by accident.

"Our goal is to do all we can to ensure only those who need to be in prison are in prison, as a matter of ensuring public safety," he said. "At the same time, we are developing new options to effectively deal with offenders, including treatment centers for felony DUI offenders and meth addicts, and expanding the number of parole and probation officers to handle more offenders under community supervision."

Ferriter noted that taxpayers spend only about \$4 a day to manage an offender on probation or parole.

The federal report showed that Montana's state prisoner population increased by only 40 during 2006, a 1.1 percent growth. That compares with an increase of 2.8 percent nationally.

(more)

During the previous five years, Montana had experienced an average annual increase of 2.6 percent, or almost 2½ times higher than the pace set in 2006.

Montana's incarceration rate of 374 has dropped significantly since fiscal year 2004 when it was 410 per 100,000 residents.

The number of offenders on parole jumped 20.1 percent last year, or almost nine times the national average. Only North Dakota, Rhode Island and Nebraska saw larger increases. The national rate was 2.3 percent.

Ferriter attributed the change to the "dedication and hard work of the state Board of Pardons and Parole and staff at our correctional facilities." It also demonstrates the faith the board has in the department's network of prerelease centers and parole officers to properly supervise the offenders in the communities, he said.

Craig Thomas, executive director for the citizen board, said the members – even with the increase in parolees – continue to make public safety and victim concerns top priorities in their decisions.

"The board members work very hard to ensure offenders are placed in the least-restrictive environment necessary to protect the public's safety," he said. "The increase in prerelease, sanction, revocation and treatment beds – in conjunction with the quality work done by all corrections professionals in Montana – have better prepared inmates for effective release into the community."

The population on probation in Montana increased by 5.5 percent in 2006, or more than three times the national rate. The states with greater increases were Alabama, Colorado, Kentucky, Idaho, Hawaii, New Mexico, Wyoming, Tennessee, Alaska, Minnesota, South Dakota and Virginia. The national average was 1.7 percent.

Ferriter noted the 2007 Legislature authorized the department to hire an additional 36 probation and parole employees to cope with the rising number of offenders on community supervision. That population grows by an average of about two offenders per day.

*The reports can be found at: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/>*

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